

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.mei.edu/content/what-pakistan-seeks-afghanistan>

What Pakistan Seeks in Afghanistan

By Dr. Marvin Weinbaum

12/21/2012

Washington and Kabul have welcomed increased Pakistani cooperation in finding a political solution to the Afghan conflict. Pakistan's willingness to release 18 Taliban-held prisoners with the promise of more is seen as demonstrating a significant change in Pakistan's approach to a settlement. But in reality Pakistan has for some time been trying to coax the Taliban to join a coalition government in Kabul. A power-sharing arrangement would go far in confronting what Pakistan perceives as acute security threats arising from an unsettled Afghanistan: a military encirclement by India and an outcome in the Afghan conflict that promotes the forces of extremism in Pakistan.

So why has Pakistan until now appeared reluctant to facilitate negotiations with the Taliban? Simply put, it has needed to be confident that its prime security interests would be satisfied in a negotiated peace. Standing in the way of such assurance has been Afghanistan's depiction of its neighbor as almost solely responsible for sustaining the insurgency, as well as an absence of trust between the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban leaderships. The first impediment has eased as the Kabul government, acting through its High Peace Council, has come to the realization that a peace agreement cannot be achieved without the inclusion of Pakistan in the negotiating process. Moreover, if the two countries can agree on the contours of a political settlement, it could open a second negotiating track alongside bilateral talks between the U.S. and the Taliban, thus possibly precluding the Americans striking a deal that prioritized U.S. interests.

Before Pakistan can throw its full weight behind negotiations it needs to be certain of having Taliban interlocutors of its own choosing. It is often assumed that because Pakistan offers sanctuary to Mullah Omar's mainline Taliban, the Haqqani network, and Gulbudeen's Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami that its intelligence agencies exercise strong leverage with these groups. In reality, the Taliban have always resisted and resented being dictated to by Pakistan. Their aims as well as strategies are often at odds. Heavy pressure on the Taliban stands the risk of having the Taliban align with Pakistan's Islamic militants in opposing the state. There is also reluctance to alienate the Taliban while they still figure in Pakistan's contingency plans in the event of a disintegrating Afghanistan.

While Pakistan may still value the Taliban as its ethnic Pashtun proxy in Afghanistan, it has shed any illusion that a strategy based on promoting Pashtun dominance can bring about a deferential, stable Afghanistan. This is not the political landscape of the 1990s when a largely indifferent world watched the Taliban progressively roll over hated warlords and put their Islamic stamp on an anarchic country. Today's Afghanistan has many more powerful domestic stakeholders who will resist a takeover and a far more concerned international community. If there is to be a political settlement in Afghanistan and civil war averted then it must be inclusive of the major Afghan power centers. But getting the Taliban's traditional adversaries to accept that it is safe to cohabit a political system with the Taliban will take a major selling job for Pakistan and far-reaching compromises by the Taliban. The Pakistanis' failure to date to get the Taliban leadership to yield on key constitutional issues or break ties to Al Qaeda suggests that a more flexible approach to negotiations will not come from Pakistan's pressure but when the Taliban's core leadership is ready to change.

Without a negotiated peace, Pakistan has reason to fear its being drawn into a costly and dangerous proxy conflict should Iran, Russia and India again back those forces resisting the Taliban. Pakistan faces the prospect that millions of Afghans will again seek refuge in Pakistan, thus putting enormous strain on a country now even less able to receive them. This time around Pakistan is not anxious to see the Taliban score an outright victory in Afghanistan, whether militarily or politically. The Pakistani military has concluded that it would be only a matter of time before the Taliban join with Pakistan's Islamic militants in trying to impose a Sharia state. The optimal outcome for Pakistan, its strategists have reasoned, would be having the Taliban included in a coalition government where they could check Indian influence and immersed in the politics of Afghanistan, diverting them from pursuing any broader Islamic ambitions.

Recent diplomatic activity notwithstanding, the prospects for a compromise agreement any time soon remain dim. There is no hurting stalemate. The Taliban fight a relative low cost insurgency where a few high profile attacks are all that is needed to give the impression that the Taliban are relentless adversaries, probably impossible to defeat. Simple logic says to hold on until the presidential election when disputed results could cause the prevailing political system to lose legitimacy. Still more compelling is the case for waiting until it becomes clear as to whether the Afghan security forces can fight with any effectiveness or can even keep from breaking up once most foreign forces have departed.

If there is anything that might entice the Taliban's leadership into peace negotiations, it is the kind of proposals that the High Peace Council has recently carried to Islamabad for Pakistan's

endorsement. Its terms would seem to offer the Taliban an opportunity to take effective control of Afghanistan's south and east in exchange for joining the country's political process. Pakistan may be initially attracted to the idea of a Pashtun buffer zone at its border or see a settlement as undermining its own insurgency. But Pakistan seems short sighted; were the Taliban to assume power in the Pashtun heartland, Pakistan's border with Afghanistan would effectively disappear and the foundations would be laid for the creation of a Pashtunistan. So while Pakistan continues to search for a political outcome to the Afghan conflict, it may get far more than it bargained for.

Dr. Marvin Weinbaum was an Afghanistan and Pakistan Analyst at the Bureau of Intelligence Research at the U.S. Department of State from 1999 to 2003. He is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois and served as Director of the South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies program. He was a Senior Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace (1996–1997), and held Fulbright Research Fellowships for Afghanistan (1989–1990) and Egypt (1981–1982).